



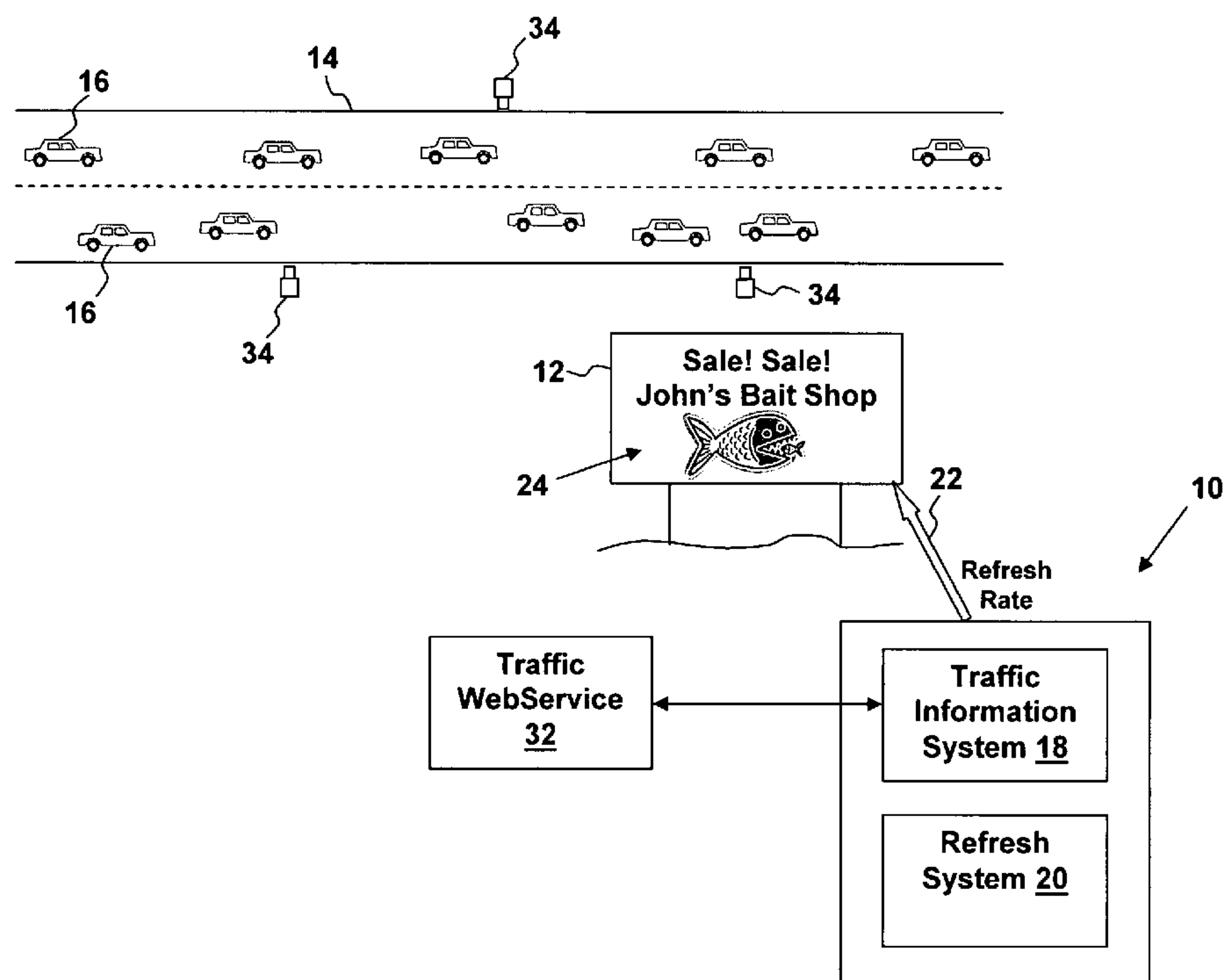
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention provides a method for determining a refresh rate of a dynamic billboard. A method in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention includes: obtaining traffic flow information; and determining the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard based on the traffic flow information.



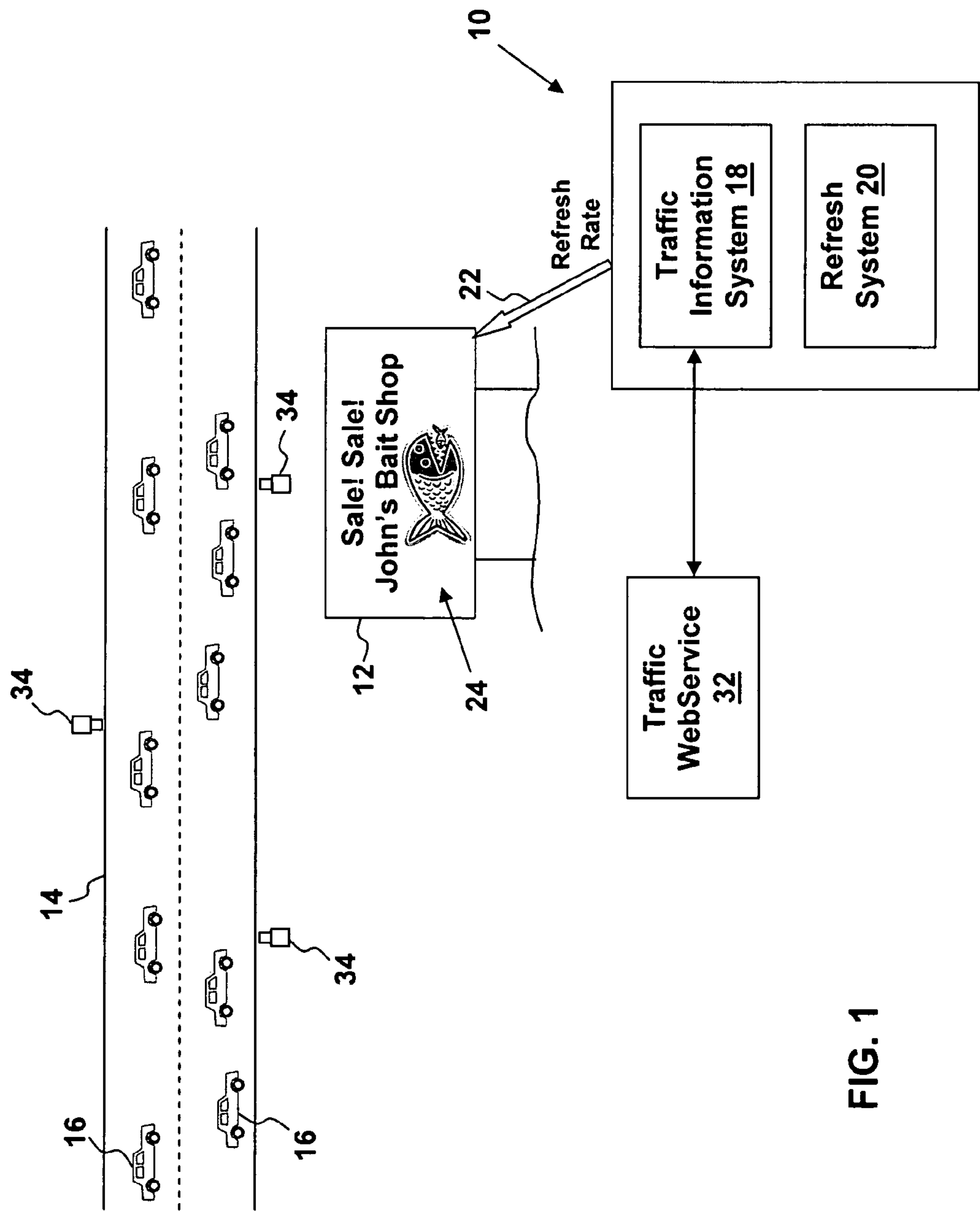


FIG. 1

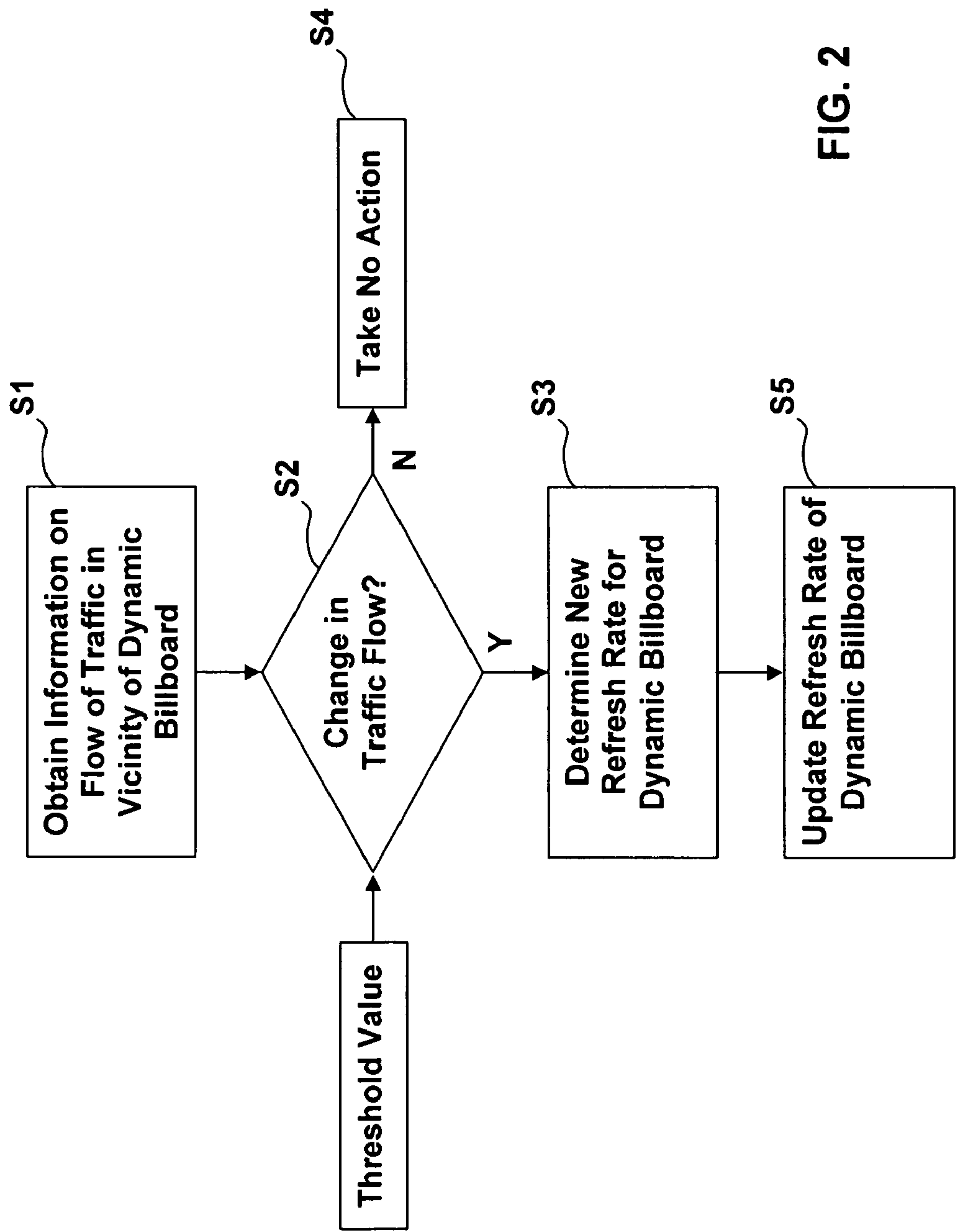


FIG. 2

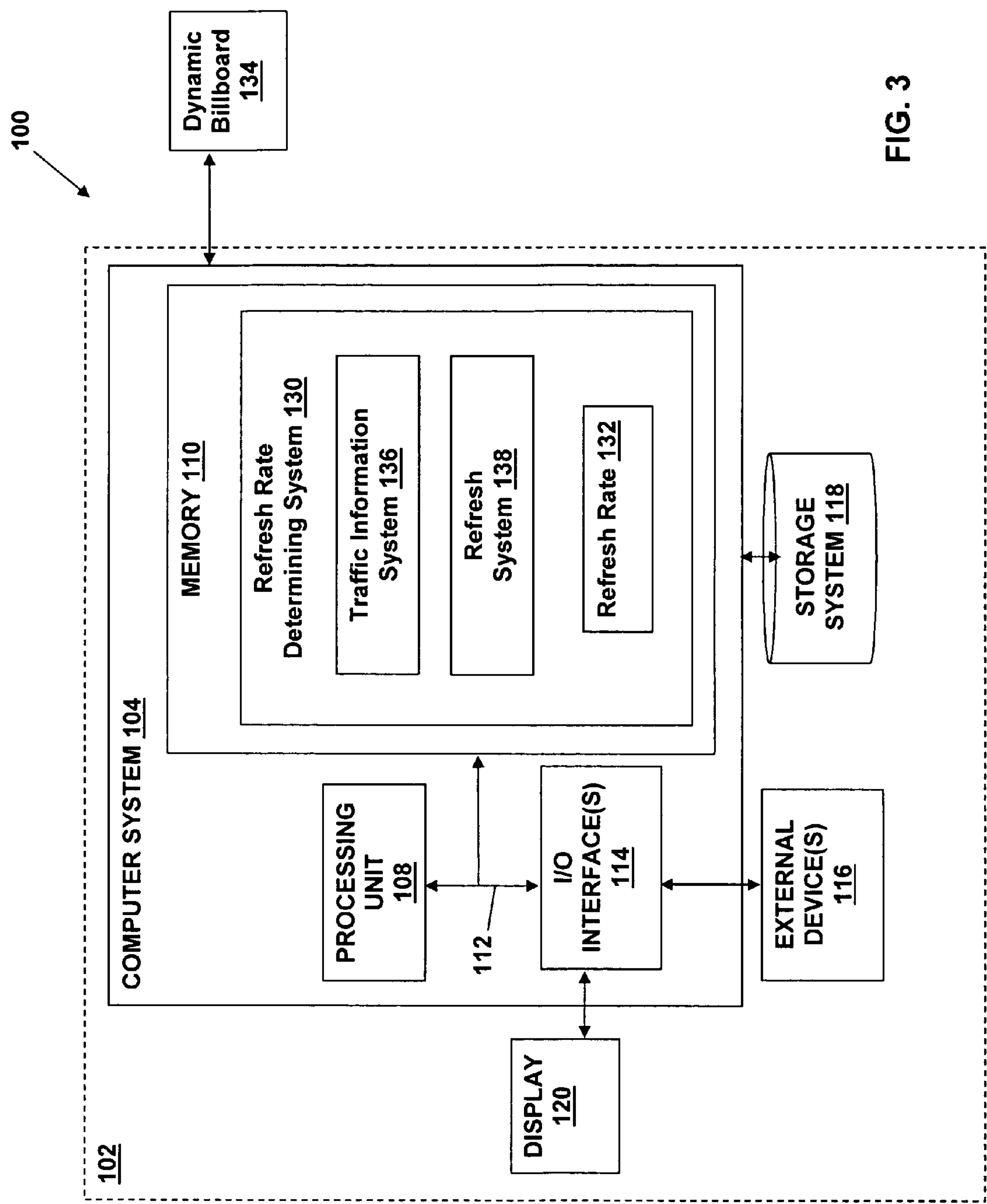


FIG. 3

DETERMINING BILLBOARD REFRESH RATE BASED ON TRAFFIC FLOW

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to advertisements, and more specifically relates to determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard based on traffic flow.

2. Related Art

A billboard is a large outdoor advertisement. Billboards are strategically located along high traffic routes to attract the attention of as many people as possible. Several different billboard systems have been implemented: a traditional billboard which shows static content, a mechanical billboard which cycles through multiple advertisements in an arbitrary interval, and a digital billboard which cycles through multiple digital advertisements in an arbitrary interval.

Dynamic mechanical and digital billboard systems have a limited effectiveness because there is no definitive mechanism for adjusting the rate at which the billboard content is refreshed with respect to traffic flow. The result is that an advertisement may not be given an optimum amount of display time.

Accordingly, a need exists for way to determine the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard based on traffic flow.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention determines the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard based on traffic flow. This allow advertisements (or other displayed messages, images, etc.) to cycle in an optimum fashion, allowing for an optimum review period for each advertisement.

A first aspect of the present invention is directed to a method for determining a refresh rate of a dynamic billboard, comprising: obtaining traffic flow information; and determining the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard based on the traffic flow information.

The illustrative aspects of the present invention are designed to solve the problems herein described and other problems not discussed

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features of this invention will be more readily understood from the following detailed description of the various aspects of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 depicts an illustrative system for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 depicts a flow diagram of an illustrative process for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 depicts an illustrative computer system for implementing embodiment(s) of the present invention.

The drawings are merely schematic representations, not intended to portray specific parameters of the invention. The drawings are intended to depict only typical embodiments of the invention, and therefore should not be considered as limiting the scope of the invention. In the drawings, like numbering represents like elements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

An illustrative refresh rate determining system **10** for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard **12** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention is depicted in FIG. 1. The dynamic billboard **12** is located near a highway **14** and is visible to the occupants of the vehicles **16** passing by on the highway **14**. The term "highway" is defined herein as any road, artery, freeway, thruway, expressway, toll road, path, street, avenue, etc., along which a vehicle **16** (e.g., automobile, truck, bus, motorcycle, and/or other ground-based mode of transportation) can travel.

The refresh rate determining system **10** includes a traffic information system **18** for obtaining information regarding the flow of traffic (e.g., velocity of vehicles **16**, flow rate of vehicles **16**, density of vehicles **16**, etc.) in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**, and a refresh system **20** for determining a refresh rate **22** for the advertisements **24** displayed by the dynamic billboard **12**, based on the traffic flow information obtained by the traffic information system **18**. The refresh rate **22** is provided to the dynamic billboard **12**, which cycles through a plurality of different advertisements **24** in accordance with the refresh rate **22**. To this extent, the dynamic billboard **12** cycles through a plurality of advertisements **24** in an optimal manner based on current traffic flow information. For example, when traffic slows down in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**, the refresh rate determining system **10** increases the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12**, such that a larger number of advertisements (i.e., number of advertisements per unit time) are displayed to the occupants of the vehicles **16**. Contrastingly, when traffic speeds up in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**, the refresh rate determining system **10** decreases the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12**, such that fewer advertisements are displayed to the occupants of the vehicles **16**. Alternatively, when the density of traffic on the highway **14** increases in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**, and is accompanied by a decrease in vehicular velocity, the refresh rate determining system **10** increases the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12**, such that a larger number of advertisements (i.e., number of advertisements per unit time) are displayed to the occupants of the vehicles **16**. Contrastingly, when the density of traffic on the highway **14** decreases in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**, and is accompanied by an increase in vehicular velocity, the refresh rate determining system **10** decreases the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12**, such that fewer advertisements are displayed to the occupants of the vehicles **16**. The refresh rate determining system **10** can be provided as a component of the dynamic billboard **22** or can be provided as a separate system that is connected to the dynamic billboard **22** in a suitable manner.

A flow diagram **30** of an illustrative process for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention is depicted in FIG. 2. The flow diagram **30** is described below in conjunction with the components of the illustrative refresh rate determining system **10** depicted in FIG. 1.

In step **S1**, the traffic information system **18** obtains information on the flow of traffic along the highway **14** in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**. The traffic flow information can be obtained periodically (e.g., every five minutes), continuously, or according to a predetermined schedule (e.g., more often during rush hour). The traffic flow information can be obtained in many different ways. For instance, in accordance with a first embodiment of the present invention, the traffic information system **18** can request real-time traffic flow information via the Internet from a WebService **32** that

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gathers traffic flow data using roadside sensors **34** distributed along the highway **14**. The roadside sensors **34** can be configured to measure, for example, the velocity, frequency, and/or density of the vehicles **16** on the highway **14**. In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, the traffic information system **18** can obtain real-time traffic flow data directly from the roadside digital sensors **34**.

The roadside sensors **34** can use any suitable technique, or combination of suitable techniques, to obtain data for use in measuring traffic flow. For example, the roadside sensors **34** can be configured to obtain the data using one or more of: radio waves, light waves (optical or infrared), microwaves, sound waves, analog signals, digital signals, Doppler shifts, pressure measurements, global positioning system (GPS) systems, cellular telephone systems, intelligent vision systems, etc. Further, the roadside sensors **34** can be configured to detect the passage of vehicles **16** having magnetic tags or markers, and/or to use signals reflected from and/or transmitted by the vehicles **16**.

In step **S2** of the flow diagram **30** depicted in FIG. **2**, the traffic flow information obtained in step **S1** is examined to determine whether the traffic flow along the highway **14** in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12** has changed enough to warrant a change in the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12**. If the traffic flow has changed more than a predetermined threshold value (e.g., the velocity of the vehicles **16** or the density of vehicles **16** along the highway **14** in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12** has increased/decreased more than X % (e.g., 10%) over a predetermined period of time), then flow passes to step **S3**. If, however, the traffic flow has not changed more than the predetermined threshold value, then flow passes to step **S4** and no action is taken.

In step **S3**, a new (updated) refresh rate to be used by the dynamic billboard **12** is determined, based on the traffic flow information obtained in step **S1**. An illustrative method for determining the new refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12** is based on the velocity of the vehicles **16**:

$$\text{Refresh Rate: } N=60 \text{ mph}/V,$$

where **N** is the refresh rate per minute of the dynamic billboard **12** (i.e., the number of advertisements displayed by the dynamic billboard **12** per minute) and **V** is the average velocity (miles/hour) of the vehicles **16** passing along the highway **14** in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **12**. To this extent, if the average velocity is 60 mph, the new refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12** is one refresh per minute (i.e., each advertisement is displayed for one minute), while if the average velocity is 10 mph, the new refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12** is six refreshes per minute (i.e., each advertisement is displayed for ten seconds). The above-example is provided for illustrative purposes only. Many other schemes for determining the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard **12** are also possible. In step **S5**, the dynamic billboard **12** updates its refresh rate in accordance with the refresh rate determined in step **S5**.

FIG. **3** shows an illustrative system **100** for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard in accordance with embodiment(s) of the present invention. To this extent, the system **100** includes a computer infrastructure **102** that can perform the various process steps described herein for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard. In particular, the computer infrastructure **102** is shown including a computer system **104** that comprises a refresh rate determining system **130**, which enables the computer system **104** to determine the refresh rate **132** of a dynamic billboard **134** by performing the process steps of the invention.

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The computer system **104** is shown as including a processing unit **108**, a memory **110**, at least one input/output (I/O) interface **114**, and a bus **112**. Further, the computer system **104** is shown in communication with at least one external device **116** and a storage system **118**. In general, the processing unit **108** executes computer program code, such as the refresh rate determining system **130**, that is stored in memory **110** and/or storage system **118**. While executing computer program code, the processing unit **108** can read and/or write data from/to the memory **110**, storage system **118**, and/or I/O interface(s) **114**. Bus **112** provides a communication link between each of the components in the computer system **104**. The at least one external device **116** can comprise any device (e.g., display **120**) that enables a user (not shown) to interact with the computer system **104** or any device that enables the computer system **104** to communicate with one or more other computer systems.

In any event, the computer system **104** can comprise any general purpose computing article of manufacture capable of executing computer program code installed by a user (e.g., a personal computer, server, handheld device, etc.). However, it is understood that the computer system **104** and the refresh rate determining system **130** are only representative of various possible computer systems that may perform the various process steps of the invention. To this extent, in other embodiments, the computer system **104** can comprise any specific purpose computing article of manufacture comprising hardware and/or computer program code for performing specific functions, any computing article of manufacture that comprises a combination of specific purpose and general purpose hardware/software, or the like. In each case, the program code and hardware can be created using standard programming and engineering techniques, respectively.

Similarly, the computer infrastructure **102** is only illustrative of various types of computer infrastructures that can be used to implement the invention. For example, in one embodiment, the computer infrastructure **102** comprises two or more computer systems (e.g., a server cluster) that communicate over any type of wired and/or wireless communications link, such as a network, a shared memory, or the like, to perform the various process steps of the invention. When the communications link comprises a network, the network can comprise any combination of one or more types of networks (e.g., the Internet, a wide area network, a local area network, a virtual private network, etc.). Regardless, communications between the computer systems may utilize any combination of various types of transmission techniques.

As previously mentioned, the refresh rate determining system **130** enables the computer system **104** to determine the refresh rate **132** of a dynamic billboard **134**. To this extent, the refresh rate determining system **130** is shown as including a traffic information system **136** for obtaining information regarding the flow of traffic (e.g., density of vehicles, velocity of vehicles, etc.) in the vicinity of the dynamic billboard **134**, and a refresh system **138** for determining the refresh rate **132** for the advertisements displayed by the dynamic billboard **134**, based on the traffic flow information obtained by the traffic information system **136**. Operation of each of these systems is discussed above. It is understood that some of the various systems shown in FIG. **3** can be implemented independently, combined, and/or stored in memory for one or more separate computer systems **104** that communicate over a network. Further, it is understood that some of the systems and/or functionality may not be implemented, or additional systems and/or functionality may be included as part of the system **100**.

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While shown and described herein as a method and system for determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard, it is understood that the invention further provides various alternative embodiments. For example, in one embodiment, the invention provides a computer-readable medium that includes computer program code to enable a computer infrastructure to determine the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard. To this extent, the computer-readable medium includes program code, such as the refresh rate determining system **130**, which implements each of the various process steps of the invention. It is understood that the term “computer-readable medium” comprises one or more of any type of physical embodiment of the program code. In particular, the computer-readable medium can comprise program code embodied on one or more portable storage articles of manufacture (e.g., a compact disc, a magnetic disk, a tape, etc.), on one or more data storage portions of a computer system, such as the memory **110** and/or storage system **118** (e.g., a fixed disk, a read-only memory, a random access memory, a cache memory, etc.), and/or as a data signal traveling over a network (e.g., during a wired/wireless electronic distribution of the program code).

In another embodiment, the invention provides a business method that performs the process steps of the invention on a subscription, advertising, and/or fee basis. That is, a service provider could offer to determine the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard as described above. In this case, the service provider can create, maintain, support, etc., a computer infrastructure, such as the computer infrastructure **102**, that performs the process steps of the invention for one or more customers. In return, the service provider can receive payment from the customer(s) under a subscription and/or fee agreement and/or the service provider can receive payment from the sale of advertising space to one or more third parties.

In still another embodiment, the invention provides a method of determining the refresh rate of a dynamic billboard. In this case, a computer infrastructure, such as the computer infrastructure **102**, can be obtained (e.g., created, maintained, having made available to, etc.) and one or more systems for performing the process steps of the invention can be obtained (e.g., created, purchased, used, modified, etc.) and deployed to the computer infrastructure. To this extent, the deployment of each system can comprise one or more of (1) installing program code on a computer system, such as the computer system **104**, from a computer-readable medium; (2) adding one or more computer systems to the computer infrastructure; and (3) incorporating and/or modifying one or more existing systems of the computer infrastructure, to enable the computer infrastructure to perform the process steps of the invention.

As used herein, it is understood that the terms “program code” and “computer program code” are synonymous and

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mean any expression, in any language, code or notation, of a set of instructions intended to cause a computer system having an information processing capability to perform a particular function either directly or after either or both of the following: (a) conversion to another language, code or notation; and (b) reproduction in a different material form. To this extent, program code can be embodied as one or more types of program products, such as an application/software program, component software/a library of functions, an operating system, a basic I/O system/driver for a particular computing and/or I/O device, and the like.

The foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of this invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed, and obviously, many modifications and variations are possible.

The invention claimed is:

1. A method for determining a refresh rate of a dynamic billboard, comprising:

obtaining traffic flow information;

determining the refresh rate per minute of the dynamic billboard based on the traffic flow information, wherein the refresh rate is equal to $60 \text{ mph}/V$, wherein V is equal to an average velocity in miles per hour of vehicles passing the dynamic billboard;

determining a percent change in the traffic flow information over a predetermined period of time, and comparing the percent change in the traffic flow information to a predetermined threshold value; and

changing a display provided by the dynamic bill board in accordance with the refresh rate only if a magnitude of the percent change in the traffic flow information is greater than the predetermined threshold value.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the dynamic billboard is selected from the group consisting of a mechanical billboard and a digital billboard.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the display comprises an advertisement.

4. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

updating the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard based on current traffic flow information.

5. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

increasing the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard when traffic slows down in a vicinity of the dynamic billboard.

6. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

decreasing the refresh rate of the dynamic billboard when traffic speeds up in a vicinity of the dynamic billboard.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein obtaining traffic flow information and determining the refresh rate are performed periodically.

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